



City of Duluth Communications Office

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SUBJECT: City Administration announces permanent closure of Lester Park Golf Course

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

City Administration announces permanent closure of Lester Park Golf Course

[Duluth, MN] In a presentation to the City of Duluth Golf Committee Tuesday night, City Administration announced that Lester Park golf course would permanently close after the 2023 golf season. The course, which closed due to COVID impacts in 2020 and 2021, will remain closed in 2021 and 2022. If all goes as planned, Lester golf will reopen for a final season in 2023 to serve the Duluth golf community while golf facilities at Enger Park undergo renovation.

In addition to the announcement to permanently close Lester, City Administration tasked the Golf Committee to work with staff to create a renovation and financing plan for Enger Golf Course for implementation in 2023. Repair and renewal of failing golf infrastructure at Enger was the top priority in the 2019 recommendations of a public golf task force. The administration's intent is to reopen the renovated Enger course in 2024 and, in association, permanently close the course at Lester.

Lester will remain closed in 2021 and 2022 due to cost. Operation of both Enger and Lester is a \$100,000 annual loss to the City's budget, which results in cuts to the City of Duluth Park Fund. For comparison, \$100,000 is the approximately cost to replace a modest playground. Operating Enger and Lester in 2021 and 2022 would have required the City to reduce its playground replacement program from two playgrounds per year to one playground per year

In 2019, the City Council approved the findings and recommendations of a public golf task force charged with advising how to save the City's financially struggling golf program. The task force found that the future of the two 54-hole system was in jeopardy as a result of a combination of:

- 1) An oversupply of public golf options in the Duluth area;
- 2) Poor course conditions resulting from failing golf infrastructure; and
- 3) Insufficient funds to pay for golf infrastructure repairs at both courses.

Based on the findings above, the task force recommended that the City:

- 1) Prioritize renovations of the Enger Park Golf Course;
- 2) Pay for the Enger renovation by selling property at both courses for the development of housing; and
- 3) Forgo the closure of Lester Park Golf Course unless and until renovating Lester was infeasible.

"Informed by the conclusions of the golf task force, our goal all along was to save Enger first then save Lester, if feasible," Chief Administrative Officer Noah Schuchman said. "The subsequent failure to sell Lester golf real estate, COVID-19 and the collapse of the economy have made it painfully clear that saving Lester is no longer feasible. When we continued to look at the financial impact of operating both courses, it became clear that the best way to keep a public golf course in Duluth is to recommend the permanent closure of Lester."

"It is time to turn the page and focus on saving Enger," Director of Parks, Properties, & Libraries director Jim Filby Williams said. "We look forward to working with the Golf Committee, Parks Commission, and advocates of Duluth Golf in creating a plan for renovating Enger that is targeted for 2023. By working together, we are confident that we can create a golf facility at Enger that everyone will enjoy."

The Golf Committee (a subsidiary of the Parks Commission) and city staff will develop a proposal to renovate Enger's golf facilities. The final plan must provide for a new irrigation system, a modest new clubhouse, a new driving range, and improvement of the worst fairways, greens, bunkers, and tee boxes and fit within a manageable funding model. Staff expects to present the plan to the Parks Commission this summer for approval.

As outlined by the public golf task force, the City intends to preserve the original Lester Park Golf Course as protected park land and engage the community to develop a plan for how the space should be used and improved following the closure of golf facilities in 2024.

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